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CREATION AND MANIFESTATION

We have remarked, on various occasions, that the idea of "creation," if one wishes to understand it in its proper and exact sense and without giving it a more or less abusive extension, is found in reality only in traditions belonging to a single line, that which is constituted by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; this line being that of the traditional forms that may be called specifically religious, one must conclude from this that there exists a direct link between this idea and the religious point of view itself. Everywhere else, the word "creation," if one insists on employing it in certain cases, can only render very inexactly a different idea, for which it would be far preferable to find another expression; moreover, this usage is most often, in fact, only the result of one of those confusions or false assimilations such as are produced so frequently in the West with regard to everything that concerns Eastern doctrines. However, it is not sufficient to avoid this confusion, and one must be just as carefully on guard against another contrary error, that which consists in wanting to see some contradiction or opposition whatsoever between the idea of creation and that other idea to which we have just alluded, and for which the most appropriate term at our disposal is that of "manifestation"; it is on this latter point that we propose to insist at present.

Certain people, indeed, recognizing that the idea of creation is not found in Eastern doctrines (with the exception of Islam, which, of course, cannot be called into question in this respect), immediately claim, and without trying to go further into the matter, that the absence of this idea is the mark of something incomplete or defective, and conclude from this that the doctrines in question could not be considered as an adequate expression of the truth. If such is the case on the religious side, where an unfortunate "exclusivism" is too often asserted, it must be said that there

are also those who, on the anti-religious side, wish to draw from the same observation conclusions that are completely opposite: these latter, naturally attacking the idea of creation as they do all ideas of a religious order, affect to see in its very absence a sort of superiority; moreover, they evidently do so only out of a spirit of negation and opposition, and not in order truly to defend Eastern doctrines, about which they care very little. Be that as it may, these reproaches and these praises are worth no more and are no more acceptable the one than the other, since they proceed in sum from one and the same error, exploited only according to contrary intentions, in conformity with the respective tendencies of those who commit it; the truth is that both sides are entirely mistaken, and that in both cases there is an incomprehension that is approximately equal.

The reason for this common error does not moreover seem very difficult to discover: those whose intellectual horizon does not go beyond Western philosophical conceptions ordinarily imagine that, where there is no question of creation, and where it is nevertheless manifest, on the other hand, that one is not dealing with materialist theories, there can only be “pantheism.” Now one knows how much this word, in our time, is often employed at random: it represents for some a veritable scarecrow, to such an extent that they believe themselves dispensed from seriously examining that to which they have hastened to apply it (the very common usage of the expression “to fall into pantheism” is quite characteristic in this regard), while, probably for this very reason more than for any other, others readily lay claim to it and are entirely disposed to make of it a sort of banner. It is therefore quite clear that what we have just said is closely connected, in the thought of both sides, with the imputation of “pantheism” commonly addressed to the same Eastern doctrines, and whose complete falsity, even absurdity (since pantheism is in reality an essentially anti-metaphysical theory), we have shown often enough that it is unnecessary to return to it once again.

Since we have been led to speak of pantheism, we shall take advantage of this to make immediately an observation that has a certain importance here, concerning a word that one is precisely accustomed to associate

with pantheistic conceptions; this word is that of "emanation," which certain people, always for the same reasons and as a result of the same confusions, wish to employ in order to designate manifestation when it is not presented under the aspect of creation. Now, at least insofar as it is a question of traditional and orthodox doctrines, this word must be absolutely set aside, not only because of this unfortunate association (whether this latter be more or less justified at bottom, which does not interest us here), but above all because, in itself and by its etymological signification, it truly expresses nothing other than a pure and simple impossibility. Indeed, the idea of "emanation" is properly that of an "issuing forth"; but manifestation must in no way be envisaged thus, for nothing can really issue forth from the Principle; if something were to issue forth from it, the Principle, from then on, could no longer be infinite, and it would find itself limited by the very fact of manifestation; the truth is that outside the Principle, there is and can be only nothingness.

If one even wished to consider "emanation," not in relation to the supreme and infinite Principle, but only in relation to Being, the immediate principle of manifestation, this term would still give rise to an objection which, though different from the preceding one, is no less decisive: if beings were to issue forth from Being in order to manifest themselves, one could not say that they are truly beings, and they would be properly deprived of all existence, for existence, under whatever mode it may be, can be nothing other than a participation in Being; this consequence, besides being visibly absurd in itself as in the other case, is contradictory with the very idea of manifestation.

These remarks having been made, we shall say clearly that the idea of manifestation, such as Eastern doctrines envisage it in a purely metaphysical manner, is in no way opposed to the idea of creation; they refer only to different levels and to different points of view, in such a way that it suffices to know how to situate each of them in its true place in order to realize that there is between them no incompatibility whatsoever. The difference, in this as in many other points, is in sum only that of the metaphysical point of view and the religious point of

view; now, if it is true that the former is of a higher and more profound order than the latter, it is no less true that it cannot in any way annul or contradict it, which is moreover sufficiently proven by the fact that the one and the other can very well coexist within a single traditional form; we shall, moreover, have to return to this later. Fundamentally, therefore, it is only a question of a difference which, although of a more accentuated degree because of the very clear distinction of the two corresponding domains, is no more extraordinary nor more embarrassing than that of the diverse points of view from which one may legitimately place oneself within a single domain, according as one penetrates it more or less profoundly. We are thinking here of such points of view as, for example, those of Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmānuja with regard to the Vedānta; it is true that there also, incomprehension has wished to find contradictions that in reality do not exist; but this itself only renders the analogy more exact and more complete.

It is moreover appropriate to specify the very sense of the idea of creation, for it seems at times to give rise also to certain misunderstandings: if "to create" is synonymous with "to make from nothing," according to the unanimously accepted definition, but one that is insufficiently explicit, one must assuredly understand by this, above all, from nothing that is exterior to the Principle; in other terms, the latter, in order to be "creator," suffices to itself, and has no need to have recourse to a sort of "substance" situated outside itself and having a more or less independent existence, which, in truth, is moreover inconceivable. One sees immediately that the first reason for being of such a formulation is to affirm expressly that the Principle is not a simple "Demiurge" (and here there is no need to distinguish whether it is a question of the supreme Principle or of Being, for this is equally true in both cases); this does not, however, necessarily mean that every "demiurgic" conception is radically false; but, in any case, it can only find a place at a much lower level and corresponding to a much more restricted point of view, which, situating itself only at some secondary phase of the cosmogonic process, no longer concerns the Principle in any way.

Now, if one confines oneself to speaking of "making from nothing" without specifying further, as is ordinarily done, there is another danger to be avoided: that of considering this "nothing" as a sort of principle, negative without doubt, but from which manifested existence would nevertheless be effectively drawn; this would be to return to an error approximately similar to that against which one has precisely wished to guard by attributing to this "nothing" itself a certain "substantiality"; and, in a sense, this error would even be still more serious than the other, for a formal contradiction would be added to it, that which consists in giving some reality to "nothing," that is to say, in sum, to nothingness. If one were to claim, in order to escape this contradiction, that the "nothing" in question is not pure and simple nothingness, but that it is such only in relation to the Principle, one would still commit in this a double error: on the one hand, one would suppose this time something quite real outside the Principle, and then there would no longer be any true difference with the "demiurgic" conception itself; on the other hand, one would fail to recognize that beings are in no way drawn from this relative "nothing" by manifestation, the finite never ceasing to be strictly nothing with respect to the Infinite.

In what has just been said, and also in all that could be said further on the subject of the idea of creation, there is lacking, as regards the way in which manifestation is considered, something that is nevertheless entirely essential: the very notion of possibility does not appear there; but, let it be well noted, this in no way constitutes a reproach, and such a view, though incomplete, is nonetheless legitimate, for the truth is that this notion of possibility has to intervene only when one places oneself at the metaphysical point of view, and, as we have already said, it is not from this point of view that manifestation is envisaged as creation.

Metaphysically, manifestation necessarily presupposes certain possibilities capable of manifesting themselves; but if it thus proceeds from possibility, one cannot say that it comes from "nothing," for it is evident that possibility is not "nothing"; and, one may perhaps object, is this not precisely contrary to the idea of creation? The answer is very easy: all possibilities are comprised in Total Possibility, which is one

with the Principle itself; it is therefore in this latter, in the final analysis, that they are really contained in a permanent state and from all eternity; moreover, if it were otherwise, it is then that they would truly be "nothing," and there could no longer even be any question of possibilities. Therefore, if manifestation proceeds from these possibilities or from certain of them (we recall here that, besides possibilities of manifestation, there are also to be envisaged possibilities of non-manifestation, at least in the supreme Principle, but no longer when one limits oneself to Being), it does not come from anything that is exterior to the Principle; and this is precisely the sense that we have recognized in the idea of creation correctly understood, so that, fundamentally, the two points of view are not only reconcilable, but even in perfect agreement with one another.

Only, the difference consists in the fact that the point of view to which the idea of creation relates envisages nothing beyond manifestation, or at least envisages the Principle only without deepening further, because it is still only a relative point of view, whereas, on the contrary, at the metaphysical point of view, it is what is in the Principle, that is to say possibility, which is in reality the essential and which matters much more than manifestation in itself.

One could say, all things considered, that these are two different expressions of a single truth, on the condition of adding, of course, that these expressions correspond to two aspects or to two points of view that themselves are really different; but then one may ask whether that one of these two expressions which is the more complete and the more profound would not be fully sufficient, and what is the reason for being of the other. It is, first of all and in a general way, the very reason for being of every exoteric point of view, insofar as it is a formulation of traditional truths limited to what is at once indispensable and accessible to all men without distinction. On the other hand, as concerns the special case in question, there may be motives of "opportunity," so to speak, particular to certain traditional forms, by reason of contingent circumstances to which they must be adapted, and requiring an express safeguard against a conception of the origin of manifestation in a

“demiurgic” mode, whereas such a precaution would be entirely useless elsewhere. However, when one observes that the idea of creation is strictly bound up with the properly religious point of view, one may thereby be led to think that there must be something else still; this is what remains for us to examine now, even if it is not possible for us to enter into all the developments to which this side of the question might give rise.

Whether it be a question of manifestation considered metaphysically or of creation, the complete dependence of manifested beings, in all that they truly are, with respect to the Principle, is affirmed just as clearly and expressly in the one case as in the other; it is only in the more precise way in which this dependence is envisaged on either side that there appears a characteristic difference, which corresponds very exactly to that of the two points of view. At the metaphysical point of view, this dependence is at the same time a “participation”: in all the measure of what they have of reality in themselves, beings participate in the Principle, since all reality is in it; it is no less true, moreover, that these beings, insofar as they are contingent and limited, as well as the entire manifestation of which they form part, are nothing with respect to the Principle, as we said above; but there is in this participation, as it were, a link with it, thus a link between the manifested and the non-manifested, which allows beings to surpass the relative condition inherent in manifestation. The religious point of view, on the contrary, insists rather on the proper nullity of manifested beings, because, by its very nature, it does not have to lead them beyond this condition; and it implies the consideration of dependence under an aspect to which corresponds practically the attitude of al-‘ubūdiyyah, to employ the Arabic term, which the ordinary sense of “servitude” undoubtedly renders only rather imperfectly in this specifically religious acceptation, but sufficiently nonetheless to allow one to understand it better than would the word “adoration” (which moreover corresponds rather to another term of the same root, ‘ibādah); now, the state of ‘abd, thus envisaged, is properly the condition of the “creature” vis-à-vis the “Creator.”

Since we have just borrowed a term from the language of the Islamic tradition, we shall add this: no one would certainly dare to contest that Islam, as regards its religious or exoteric side, is at least as "creationist" as Christianity itself may be; yet, this in no way prevents the fact that, in its esoteric aspect, there is a certain level from which the idea of creation disappears. Thus, there is an aphorism according to which "the Ṣūfī (one must be careful to note that it is not a question here of the simple mutaṣawwuf) is not created" (Eṣ-Ṣūfī lam yukhlaq); this amounts to saying that his state is beyond the condition of "creature," and indeed, insofar as he has realized the "Supreme Identity," thus insofar as he is actually identified with the Principle or with the Uncreated, he can necessarily himself be only uncreated. There, the religious point of view is no less necessarily surpassed, in order to give place to the purely metaphysical point of view; but, if the one and the other can thus coexist in the same tradition, each at the rank that suits it and in the domain that belongs to it properly, this proves very evidently that they do not oppose or contradict one another in any way.

We know that there can be no real contradiction, either within each tradition, or between this one and other traditions, since there are in all of this only diverse expressions of the one Truth. If someone believes he sees apparent contradictions there, should he not therefore conclude quite simply that there is something there that he understands badly or incompletely, instead of pretending to impute to the traditional doctrines themselves defects that, in reality, exist only by reason of his own intellectual insufficiency?

THE CAVE AND THE LABYRINTH

In a recent book of interesting researches[1], taking as his point of departure the passage of the sixth Book of the Aeneid where the doors of the cave of the Sibyl of Cumae are described, Mr. Jackson Knight asks: why are the Labyrinth of Crete and its history depicted on these doors? He quite rightly refuses to see there, as some have done who go no further than modern "literary" conceptions, a simple digression more or less useless; he considers, on the contrary, that this passage must have a real symbolic value, basing himself on a close relation between the labyrinth and the cave, both of them being connected to the same idea of a subterranean journey. This idea, according to the interpretation he gives of concordant facts belonging to epochs and regions very different from one another, would have been originally linked to funerary rites, and would then have been, by virtue of a certain analogy, transferred into initiatic rites; we shall return more particularly to this point presently, but we must first make some reservations concerning the very way in which he conceives initiation.

It seems indeed that he envisages this solely as a product of "human thought," endowed moreover with a vitality that assures it a sort of permanence through the ages, even if at times it subsists, so to speak, only in a latent state; we have no need at all, after all that we have already set forth on this subject, to show anew all that is insufficient there, precisely because there is no account taken of the "supra-human" elements that in reality constitute here the essential. We shall insist only on this: the idea of a subsistence in a latent state leads to the hypothesis of a conservation in a "collective subconscious" borrowed from certain recent psychological theories; whatever one may think of these, there is in any case, in the application that is thus made of them, a complete ignorance of the necessity of the initiatic "chain," that is to say of an effective and uninterrupted transmission. It is true that there is another question that must be carefully avoided from being confused with this

1 W. F. Jackson Knight, Cumean Gates, a Reference of the Sixth Aeneid to Initiation Patterns, Oxford, 1936.

one: it may sometimes have happened that things of a properly initiatic order find expression through individualities who were in no way conscious of their true significance, and we have formerly explained ourselves on this subject with regard to the legend of the Grail; but, on the one hand, this does not in any way touch what concerns initiation itself in its reality, and, on the other hand, one cannot envisage in this way the case of Virgil, in whom there are, just as in Dante, indications that are far too precise and too manifestly conscious for it to be possible to admit that he was foreign to all effective initiatic affiliation. What is in question has nothing to do with "poetic inspiration" as it is understood today, and, in this respect, Mr. J. Knight is certainly too disposed to share the "literary" views to which his thesis nevertheless opposes itself elsewhere; but we must nonetheless recognize all the merit there is, for a university writer, in having the courage to approach such a subject, or even simply to speak of initiation.

That said, let us return to the question of the relations between the funerary cave and the initiatic cave: although these relations are assuredly very real, the identification of the one and the other, as regards their symbolism, represents at most only half of the truth. Let us moreover remark that, even from the sole funerary point of view, the idea of making symbolism derive from ritual, instead of seeing, on the contrary, in ritual itself the symbolism in action that it truly is, already places the author in great embarrassment when he observes that the subterranean journey is almost always followed by a journey in the open air, which many traditions represent as a navigation; this would indeed be inconceivable if it were only a question of an imagistic description of a burial ritual, but is explained on the contrary perfectly when one knows that it is in reality a question of diverse phases traversed by the being in the course of a migration that is truly "from beyond the grave," and which in no way concerns the body that it has left behind it upon quitting terrestrial life.

On the other hand, by reason of the analogy that exists between death understood in the ordinary sense of this word and the initiatic death of which we have spoken on another occasion, one and the same symbolic

description may apply equally to what happens to the being in the one and the other case; there lies, as regards the cave and the subterranean journey, the reason for the assimilation envisaged, insofar as it is justified; but, at the point where it must legitimately stop, one is still only at the preliminaries of initiation, and not at initiation itself.

Indeed, one cannot see, in all rigor, anything more than a preparation for initiation in the death to the profane world, followed by the "descent into Hell" which is, of course, the same thing as the journey into the subterranean world to which the cave gives access; and, as for initiation itself, far from being considered as a death, it is on the contrary considered as a "second birth," as well as a passage from darkness to light. Now the place of this birth is again the cave, at least in the cases where it is in this latter that initiation is accomplished, in fact or symbolically, for it goes without saying that one must not generalize too much and that, just as also for the labyrinth of which we shall speak next, it is not a question of something that is necessarily common to all initiatic forms without exception. The same thing appears, moreover, even exoterically, in the Christian symbolism of the Nativity, just as clearly as in other traditions; and it is evident that the cave as a place of birth cannot have precisely the same signification as the cave as a place of death or of sepulture.

One could however remark, in order at least to connect these different and even apparently opposed aspects with one another, that death and birth are in sum only the two faces of one and the same change of state, and that the passage from one state to another is always regarded as having to take place in obscurity[2]; in this sense, the cave would therefore be, more exactly, the very place of this passage; but this, while being strictly true, still refers only to one of the sides of its complex symbolism.

If the author has not succeeded in seeing the other side of this symbolism, this is very probably due to the influence exercised upon him by the theories of certain "historians of religions": following these

2 One could also recall, in this regard, the symbolism of the grain of wheat in the mysteries of Eleusis.

latter, he admits indeed that the cave must always be connected to "chthonic" cults, doubtless for the somewhat too "simplistic" reason that it is situated within the earth; but this is very far from the truth[3]. Yet, he cannot do otherwise than notice that the initiatic cave is given above all as an image of the world[4]; but his hypothesis prevents him from drawing the consequence that nevertheless imposes itself, which is this: since it is so, this cave must form a complete whole and contain within itself the representation of heaven as well as that of earth; if it happens that heaven is expressly mentioned in some text or figured in some monument as corresponding to the vault of the cave, the explanations proposed on this subject become so confused and so unsatisfactory that it is no longer possible to follow them. The truth is that, far from being a dark place, the initiatic cave is illuminated interiorly, so that it is on the contrary outside of it that darkness reigns, the profane world being naturally assimilated to the "outer darkness," and the "second birth" being at the same time an "illumination"[5]. Now, if one asks why the cave is envisaged in this way from the initiatic point of view, we shall reply that the solution of this question is found, on the one hand, in the fact that the symbol of the cave is complementary to that of the mountain, and, on the other hand, in the relation that closely unites the symbolism of the cave to that of the heart; we propose to treat these two essential points separately, but it is not difficult to understand, from all that we have already had occasion to set forth elsewhere, that what is in question is in direct relation with the very representation of spiritual centers.

We shall pass over other questions which, however important they may

3 This unilateral interpretation leads him to a singular mistake: he cites, among other examples, the Shinto myth of the dance executed before the entrance of a cave in order to make the "ancestral goddess" come out who had hidden herself there; unfortunately for his thesis, it is not at all a question of the "earth-mother," as he believes and even says expressly, but indeed of the solar goddess, which is quite different.

4 In Freemasonry, it is the same with the Lodge, whose designation some have even compared with the Sanskrit word guhā, which is symbolically exact, if not etymologically; but it must be added that the Lodge is not assimilated to the cave, and that the equivalent of this latter is found only, in this case, at the very beginning of the initiatic trials, so that there attaches to it no other sense than that of a subterranean place, in direct relation with the ideas of death and of "descent."

5 In Masonic symbolism also, and for the same reasons, the "lights" are obligatorily found within the Lodge; and the word guhā, which we recalled a moment ago, is also directly connected to a root whose primary sense designates light.

be in themselves, intervene here only accessorily, such as, for example, that of the signification of the "golden bough"; it is very contestable that one can identify this latter, except perhaps under a very secondary aspect, with the staff or wand which, under diverse forms, are encountered very generally in traditional symbolism[6]. Without insisting further on this, we shall examine, in a second part, what concerns the labyrinth, whose meaning may appear still more enigmatic, or at least more concealed, than that of the cave, and the relations that exist between the one and the other.

6 It would certainly be much more correct to assimilate this "golden bough" to the druidic mistletoe and to the Masonic acacia, without speaking of the "branches" of the Christian feast that bears precisely this name, insofar as symbol and pledge of resurrection and immortality.